

# FUNDAMENTALS OF INTERIOR DECORATION

CIRCULAR SERIES

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ISSUED BY THE SMALL HOMES COUNCIL

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INTERIOR DECORATION  
SMALL HOMES COUNCIL  
**H1.0**



# The Purpose

**THE PURPOSE OF INTERIOR DECORATION** or interior design is to make the home more livable and attractive. Decoration involves personal likes and dislikes — individual interpretations of comfort, beauty, economy, and

ease of maintenance. It involves the study of habits and hobbies. It involves large measures of common sense, which really means common sense in terms of what would be best for the people who will use a particular home, not what is best by some arbitrary standard. Interior decoration which does not take into consideration these individual concepts can never be accurately called successful, regardless of how well it pleases some professionals. The opinions of the best decorators vary widely, and that difficult-to-define thing called "good taste" is really not as narrow as some people would have us believe. Actually there are always solutions to any problem which will be good by professional standards and at the same time completely satisfactory to the inhabitants of the home. But in beginning, remember that the complete satisfaction of those who live with it is the key to successful interior decoration.

## INTERIOR DECORATION MUST

1. Serve the living habits of you and your family.
2. Satisfy your ideas of comfort, beauty, economy, ease of maintenance or "housekeeping."
3. Satisfy the broader standards of good design.

## WHERE MUST INTERIOR DECORATION BE USED?

The lowest cost house should be as livable, therefore as successfully decorated, as the mansion. Every budget, however small, provides for certain furnishings which are the basis for decoration.

## INTERIOR DECORATION MUST NOT

be merely a superficial frosting unrelated to human needs, comfort, or ease of maintenance. It is not good if it does nothing more than satisfy a fad or the whims and prejudices of an individual, while violating all rules of good design.

# The Elements

**INTERIOR SPACE** is the first element of decoration. The location and size of windows, doors, wall areas, and such stationary objects as cabinets or a fireplace determine to a considerable extent how the decoration should be handled. There are two general situations:

## WITH A HOUSE TO BE BUILT:

The right time to consider wall space or window location for furniture placement and decoration is when the plans are being drawn or selected. After a house is built, structural changes are expensive.

## WITH A HOUSE ALREADY BUILT:

Interior decoration must make the most of what there is. It can and should do much to counteract architectural faults, as well as to enhance good features. Once a new house has been decorated, all redecoration comes under this heading.

**THE FURNISHINGS** are the *tangible elements* which decorate interior space. They are the tools of the interior decorator.

1. Paint, wallpaper, and other wall coverings
2. Flooring and floor coverings
3. Draperies, curtains, and shades
4. Furniture (Seats, tables, desks, storage pieces, beds, music and recreational equipment)
5. Lighting equipment (Fixtures and portable lamps)
6. Pictures and other accessories
7. Heating equipment and other appliances

Successful decoration grows from a carefully considered long-range plan.

Too often furnishings are acquired in a *hit-or-miss* manner over a period of years. This practice usually fails to produce successful decoration.

Before planning your interior, make a complete list of all the furnishings needed to decorate your home. This list will vary in each home to suit the tastes and living activities of the family and their

budget. Check off the furnishings you already have that will fit into your scheme.

If careful budgeting is necessary, decide where economy will not work to your disadvantage. For example, a mattress which soon becomes lumpy and uncomfortable is a poor investment. On the other hand, curtains and other items not subject to heavy wear can be of inexpensive material and still be effective. Your best guide to the quality of furnishings is the informative tag that may be attached to the item describing the material and method of construction used.

In a new home, many people wisely use what they have and postpone actual decorating until they have lived there for a few years. Besides being economical, this procedure allows time to develop your plans and shop for furnishings which will give lasting satisfaction.

## SCALE, FORM, COLOR, AND ARRANGEMENT

Two people may use furnishings of equal cost to decorate the same space; one may succeed where the other fails. Success is governed by a knowledge and understanding of the more or less *intangible elements* of decoration: Scale, Form, Color, and Arrangement. These less-understood factors need to be treated in some detail in this introductory circular on decoration because they are the basic principles of decoration which govern the standards of good design.



# SCALE . . .

has to do with the size of furnishings in relation to each other, to the room, and to the human figure. Remember these things about scale:

- A. Furnishings used together should be similar in scale to achieve harmony. A small, spindly end table looks out of place beside a large davenport.
- B. The scale of furnishings must suit the room. Huge overstuffed chairs are out of scale with a small room and make it seem smaller.
- C. The size of furniture must be right for the comfort and use of those who use it most. For example, some tables do not have enough knee height; some chairs are too long in the seat from front to back for short people.

## SOME POINTS TO CHECK ON SCALE:

1. Are your lamps large enough for the tables and chairs with which they are used? Large shades may help, or you may need bigger lamps.
2. Are your pictures and mirrors too small for the furniture under them or the wall on which they hang? Try grouping several small pictures, or frame them with larger mats to make them more important.
3. Do you have a table which is too small for the picture or mirror above it? Try flanking the table with chairs.
4. Is your room too long for its width? Put a large mirror on one of the side walls.
5. Do the draperies and curtains seem too skimpy for the height and the width of the window? An abundance of inexpensive material is better than too little costly material.
6. Do you have so many rugs in one room that it seems disorganized or cramped? Floor covering laid wall to wall gives a room unity, makes it seem spacious.

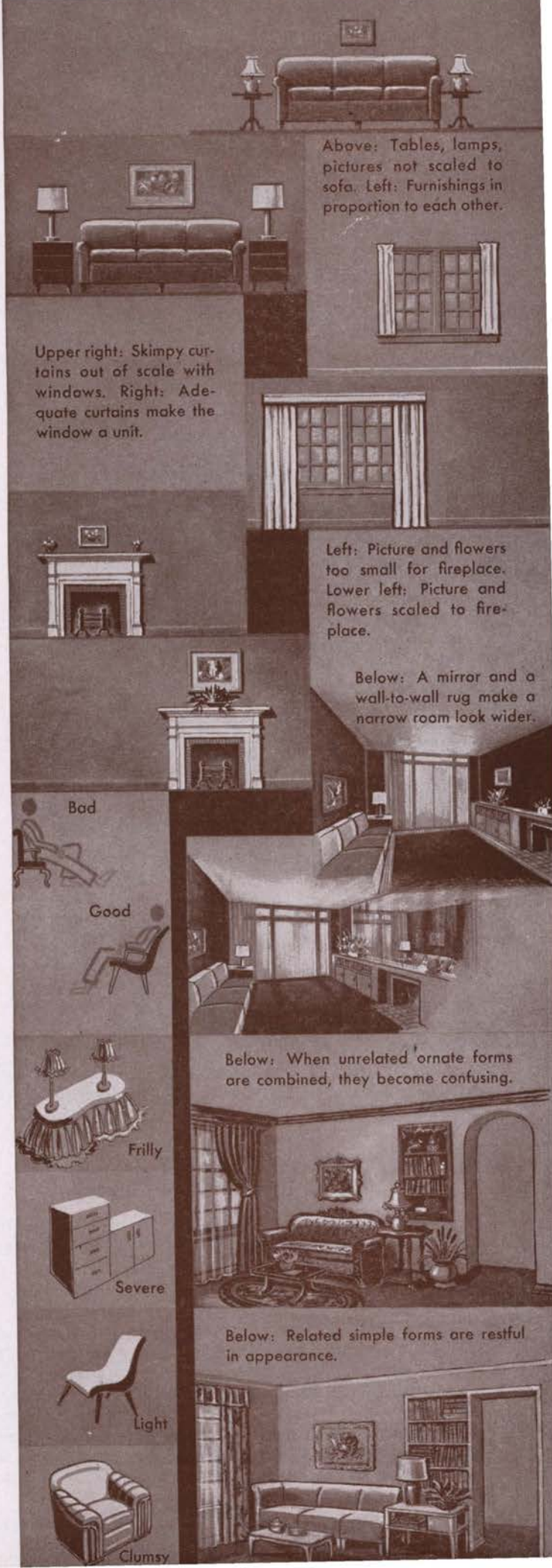
# FORM . . .

is the shape of things. It is form more than anything else that distinguishes the various historic styles or periods. Form also influences the character of decoration, as often seen in the frilly forms in a girl's room in contrast to severe simplicity in a boy's room.

Well-designed furniture is simple in form. Good form can be light or heavy in appearance, softened by curves or made severe by straight lines; but it is not complicated or clumsy. If you want curves, see that they are strong, open curves, free from petty twists and gingerbread. Periods can be mixed freely with each other and with modern when the forms are good.

The principles of form apply not only to furniture, but also to draperies, lamp shades, picture frames, casings, baseboards, etc. Simplicity of form is an aid to:

1. Easier housekeeping and maintenance.
2. Greater possibilities for furniture arrangement.





# COLOR . . .



can accomplish more at less cost than any other element of interior decoration. A can of paint is not the only source of color, for everything in a room has color, either applied or natural.

Color creates atmosphere, makes a room seem gay or restful, warm or cool, drab or interesting. Color can be used to unify a room, hide ugly shapes, accent points of interest, make a small room seem larger or a dark room lighter.

THE SCIENCE OF COLOR HARMONY is too complicated for this brief outline, but two fundamental points should be noted. 1. Colors may be pure ("strong") or greyed ("soft"). This characteristic is technically called the *intensity* or *chroma* of the color.

2. They may be light or dark. This characteristic is technically called the *value* of the color. Both intensity and value exist in all colors at the same time. For example, vermillion is a pure, medium value red; maroon is a dark, greyed red; buff is a light, greyed yellow.

## HOW COLOR IS USED IN DECORATION

There are many sources of information\* which will give you suggestions on the use of warm and cool colors, and information on the three types of color schemes (contrasting, analogous or closely related, and monochromatic).

Regardless of the scheme you choose, *successful use of color in decoration is achieved by a balance of colors of different intensities and values*. A room in which all the colors are light and greyed is usually weak, uninteresting. A room in which the predominant areas of color are pure (either light or dark) is harsh, unlivable, and soon tiresome. Walls, ceilings, and floor cov-

erings are large areas which form the basis of any color scheme. Generally these large areas should be soft and greyed. As such, they are easier to live with and form a background which combines easily with the stronger colors of the furnishings and accessories. The pure colors form the accents in a room because a small amount of pure, strong color will balance a large area of soft, greyed color. Notice how occasional chairs, vases, flowers, pictures, and small accessories can be brilliant in color, and much lighter or darker, without destroying the unity of a color scheme.

## A FEW SUGGESTIONS ON COLOR

1. Choose colors *you* like, not necessarily the colors of current fashion. Be sure that your colors are of the correct value and intensity.

2. Don't be drab in order to be practical. Bright colors show soil no more than neutral colors of the same value.

3. Generally, you should limit yourself to three or four main colors in a room. This limitation will require you to repeat each color throughout the room, and thereby help you to achieve unity.

4. Before you decorate, collect color samples of wallpaper, paint, upholstery, and carpeting.\* Have before you every color you intend to use. Study the combination carefully. Take your time. If you still like it after a day or two, go ahead.

\*A new BASIC HOME FURNISHINGS COLOR COORDINATION PLAN is being developed by home furnishings manufacturers. Rugs, paints, wallpaper, draperies, etc., will be keyed to basic color groups, thus enabling homemakers to buy furnishings in harmonious color combinations.

5. It is much easier to harmonize the color of walls and curtains with a rug than to match a rug to the walls and curtains.

6. Plain rugs are easier to adapt to a decorative scheme than a multi-colored large-patterned rug. If you prefer a figured floor covering, be sure the figure is unobtrusive.

7. For a spacious look, use curtain material of the same value (lightness or darkness) but not necessarily of the same identical color as the walls. If figured curtains or draperies are used, some of the color of the walls should appear in the pattern.

8. Have all lamp shades the same color and height, properly designed for good lighting.

# ARRANGEMENT . . .

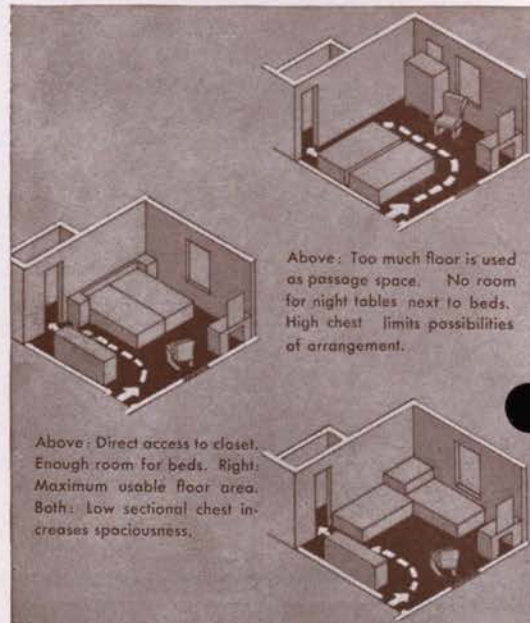
of furnishings is the most easily understood of the principles of decoration because it is governed by real limitations:

1. The use of the furnishings by the family.

2. The placement of doors, windows, wall space, and other architectural features of interior space.

Arrangement also influences the degree of formality of decoration, the usefulness of floor space, and the sense of spaciousness in the room.

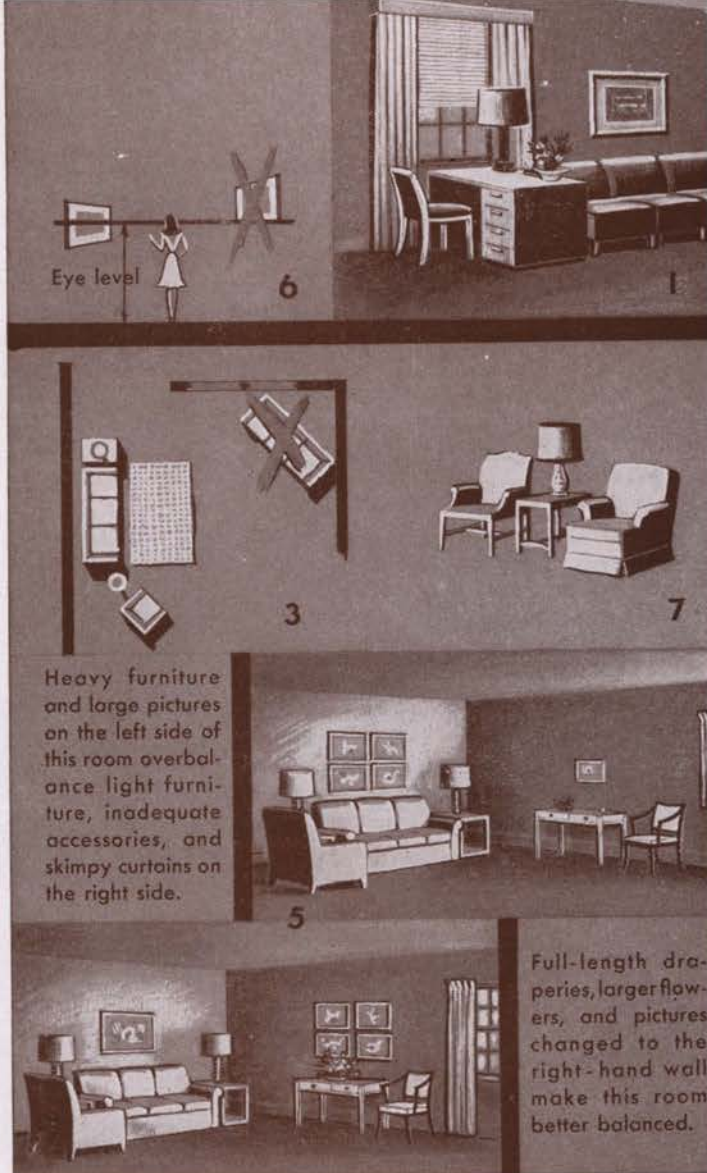
The placing of furniture should be studied on the plans of a new home, and in any case before decoration is done or furnishings bought. One of the best ways to study arrangement is to use cardboard cut-outs of furniture, made to scale, arranged upon a scaled plan of the room. Several good arrangements should be possible in each room. Built-in cabinets are an important aid to efficient use of space.





## ARRANGEMENT: SOME GOOD POINTS

1. An arrangement should not be avoided merely because it is unusual. Try your desk at a right angle to window so the light will come from the side. If the room is not too small, try the sofa out in the room instead of along the wall.
2. Try new arrangements with your furniture every few months. Leave it in the new position for at least three days even if you are not sure you like it. If you are not satisfied after three days, try correcting it rather than returning the furniture to its original place.
3. Large pieces of furniture and throw rugs should be placed parallel to the walls, not diagonally.
4. Remember that the purpose of most living rooms is to bring people together for conversation. Pull the chairs out of the far corners; group chairs together.
5. If your larger pieces of furniture are grouped so closely that the room seems heavy on one side, shift some pieces. If usability dictates an overbalancing of furniture, try moving the larger pictures and accessories to the other side of the room.
6. Pictures should be hung about eye level. The bottom of a 20" by 30" frame will be about 48" from the floor.
7. Place tables and lamps near chairs and sofas. Where possible, make a table and lamp serve two or more seats.
8. Some bare spots in your home are desirable. A room with too little furniture is better than a room which is cluttered. Simplicity enhances beauty.



## FORGET RULES LIKE THESE

1. Forget: "Blue and green should never be used together." Use your eye, not your fears. Select from samples, and you will find many combinations which are pleasing to the eye.
2. Forget: "All woods in a room must be identical." If you want historical precedent as proof, the eighteenth century English styles, which are intermixed freely, were in walnut, mahogany, and satinwood. The various colors of woods harmonize and add interest.
3. Forget: "Never mix periods, or modern and traditional in the same room." George the First (early eighteenth century) and Hepplewhite (late eighteenth century) were mixed freely in interiors of 150 years ago. These two styles of furniture are as different as modern and traditional.

Many good magazines and books are now published on interior decoration. Keep a scrapbook of pictures which illustrate decorating ideas that you like.

When in doubt about decorating, consult a good interior decorator. Competent professional advice often saves money.

## DON'T MAKE THESE MISTAKES

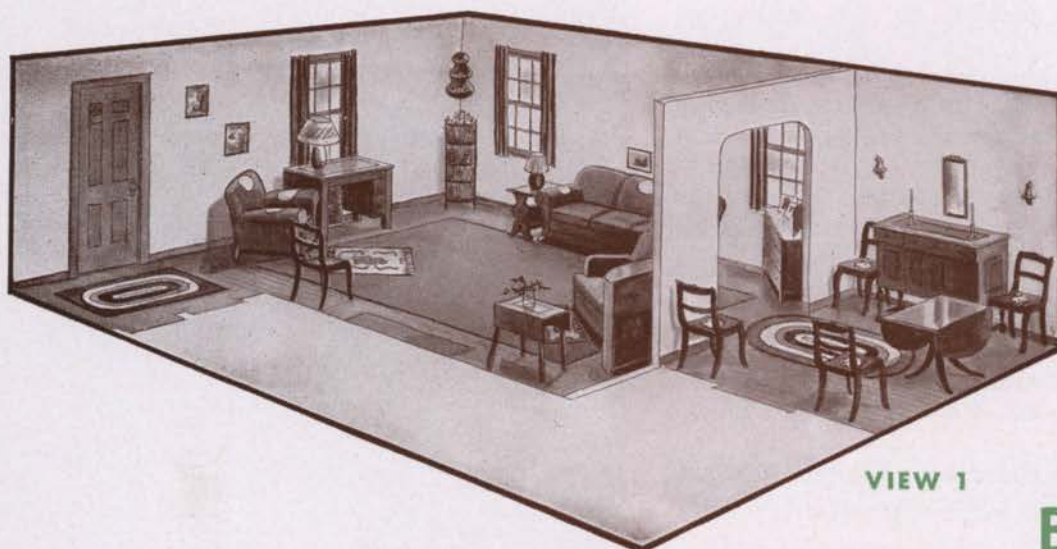
1. Don't mistake "fancy" elaboration or the sentimental for beauty in furniture, pictures, and accessories.
2. Don't hesitate to paint old woodwork just because the wood is "genuine oak."
3. Don't use a chair or table simply as a space-filler — an isolated chair or table is seldom used to full advantage.
4. Don't use too many small throw rugs in one room. They usually destroy unity.
5. Don't buy several cheap statues or vases. Buy one good piece instead.
6. Don't use two strong patterns close together. You may have plain or figured curtains with a plain wall; but plain curtains are usually better with a figured wall.



# A TYPICAL DECORATING PROBLEM

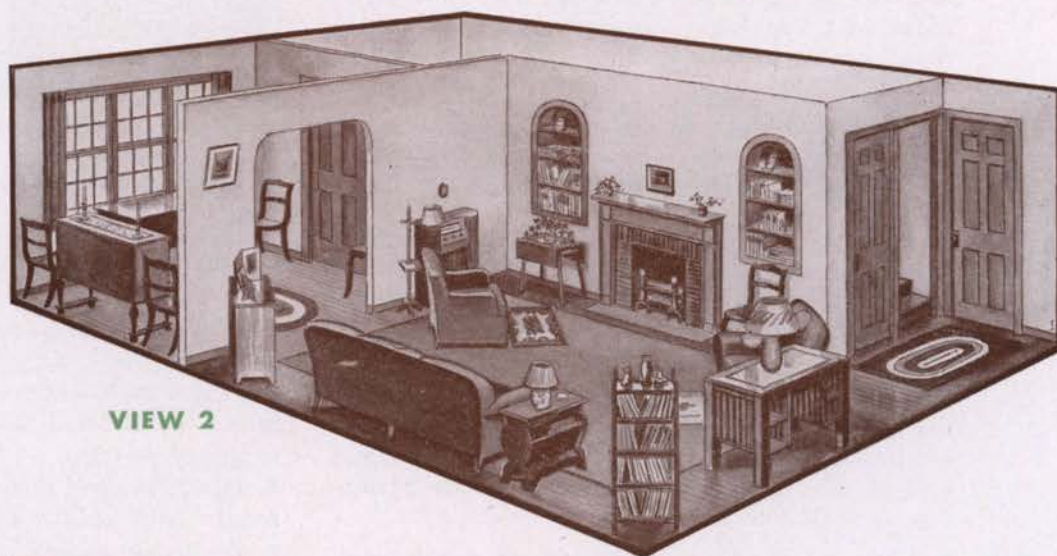
These drawings show how an application of the fundamentals discussed in this circular can improve the appearance and livability of a room. The plan of the rooms and the furnishings shown were not selected because they are ideal, but because they are typical of small-home plans and of the furnishings which a great many families have on hand.

A fundamental part of the improvement shown here was gained by rearrangement of furniture and pictures. Further improvement was made by the change in draperies, rugs, slip covers, and the painting of walls and the dark wood trim. The purchase of some new furnishings was necessary to fulfill certain needs and substitute for furniture ill-adapted to the space available. The rest of the improvement is made by the addition of the new fireplace wall and elimination of the dining-room partition. These architectural changes, which would be too expensive for some home owners, are shown here as a guide to people who are building a new home. The spaciousness gained by these changes should be noted.



VIEW 1

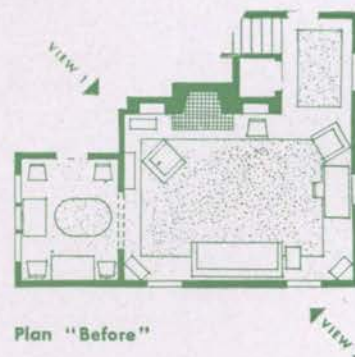
**BEFORE**



VIEW 2

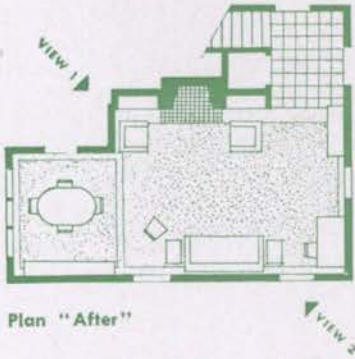
## Note in the BEFORE views:

1. Scattered placement of large pieces of furniture makes conversation difficult and disrupts unity of the room. One chair almost blocks entrance.
2. Diagonal pieces in corners waste space — particularly bad in small rooms.
3. Picture on dining-room partition is too high.
4. Throw rug at foot of stairs is dangerous.
5. Rugs are too small for room, break floor area and make rooms look smaller. Throw rugs do not help.
6. Lamp beside davenport, pictures over davenport, fireplace, and radio are much too small.
7. Dark woodwork, skimpy draperies contribute to broken-up appearance.
8. Buffet is too bulky for small dining room.

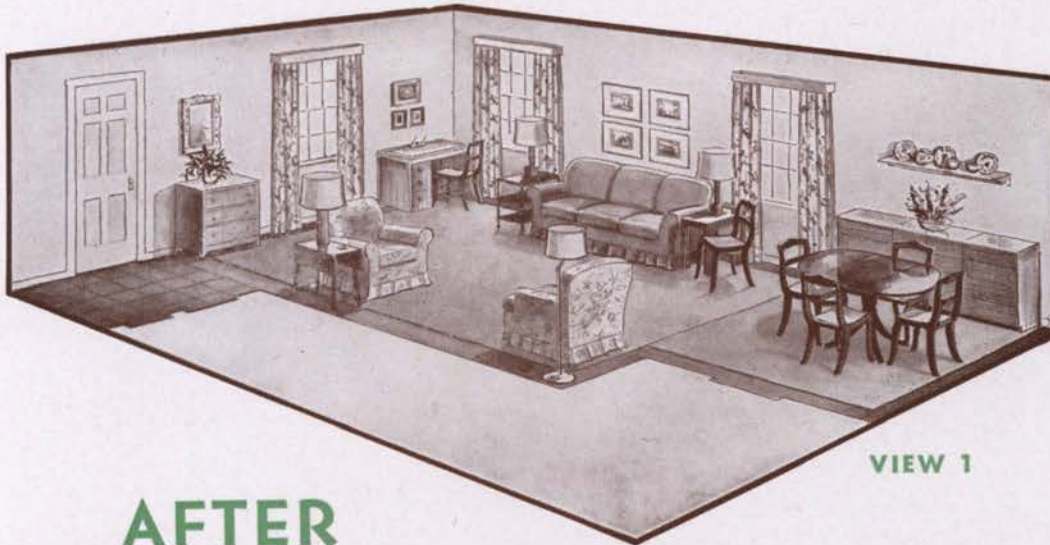




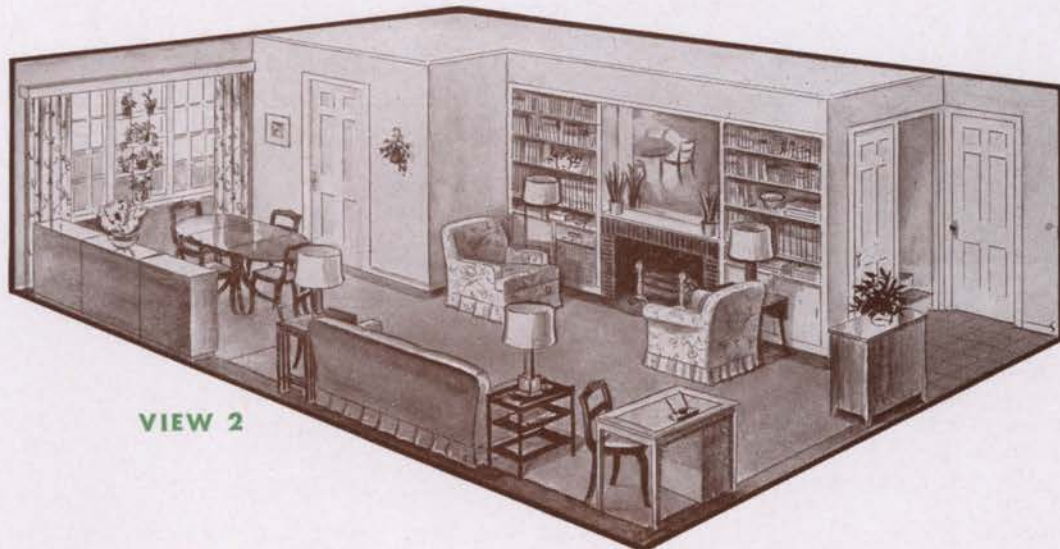
### Note in the AFTER views:



1. Large chairs, facing each other in front of fireplace and parallel with walls, help unify room. Passage areas are open.
2. All larger pieces are now parallel to walls (less important in larger rooms).
3. Picture groups or pictures are in proportion to size of furniture.
4. Dining table and chairs are ready for use to save work.
5. Mirror for convenience of guests is near entrance.
6. Larger rugs add spaciousness and unify rooms. Absence of throw rugs contributes to feeling of spaciousness.
7. All lamps are tall enough for good reading and large enough to be in scale with rest of furniture.
8. Ample, full-length draperies add unity, hang well back from glass area.
9. Nest of tables beside davenport gives great utility and conserves space.
10. Desk is straight-legged table with small set of drawers under one end.
11. Lower, shallower sectional units give additional storage and are better adapted in size to small dining area than bulky "period" buffet.
12. Linoleum on entrance floor is easily cleaned and polished.



**AFTER**





# modern OR TRADITIONAL



Today this question, which usually centers upon the furniture, confronts every home decorator. Your decision should depend upon individual preference. Don't let your decoration be influenced too much by the old furniture on hand. If your furniture is well-enough designed to combine with traditional decoration, it will combine equally well with modern.

## SOME ADVANTAGES OF GOOD MODERN FURNITURE

1. **Simpler in form, easier to maintain.**
2. **More flexible.** Sectional pieces permit numerous arrangements and are helpful in achieving spaciousness.
3. **Better scaled** to most rooms that are being built today. Much period furniture was originally designed for mansions and cannot always be successfully reduced in size.
4. **Lasting style.** Good modern design depends on fundamentals of beauty such as good proportion and form. The basic shapes used in most modern furnishings should never go out of style.

## SOME ADVANTAGES OF TRADITIONAL FURNITURE

1. **More homelike.** This may be because it is more familiar, or because some "modern" seems severe, mechanical.
2. **Less risk of mistakes,** if you are not sure of your judgment of design. (This applies only to authentic reproductions and antiques.)
3. **Often more harmonious** with traditional houses.
4. **More easily obtained,** especially in smaller cities. (This advantage will not be true for long.)
5. **Less expensive** than modern of similar quality. (Won't be true when more modern is built; simplicity adapts modern to mass production.)

## THE NATURAL SOLUTION IS TO USE BOTH

1. The sentimental or antique value of some older pieces makes us reluctant to discard them.
2. Furnishings are never static; pieces are added to, altered, and eliminated over a period of years.
3. The cost of complete refurnishing is too great for most budgets. Few people can afford to stay in vogue, or to discard sound, usable furniture.
4. Some modern pieces, such as sectional units and storage cabinets, serve our needs so well that we cannot overlook them simply because they are not styled according to a bygone period.
5. Combining helps create that lived-in atmosphere.
6. Combining old and new is easy, if the fundamentals of scale and form are carefully observed.

## DECORATE IN THE MODERN MANNER

whether your furniture is traditional or modern or a blending of both. Modern decoration is a way of doing things, not a style. It may even be described as *against devotion to style*. In order to obtain the modern manner:

1. **Have things which are both useful and beautiful.**
2. **Strive for ease of maintenance.** Eliminate bric-a-brac which makes housekeeping difficult. Build in ample storage units for seldom-used articles.
3. **Strive for spaciousness.** Today's homes are smaller. The modern manner of decoration employs principles of arrangement, form, scale, color, and pattern which seem to enlarge a room.
4. **Suit your furnishings to their purpose.** For hard usage, an Early American scheme may be more appropriate than a so-called "modern" bleached and streamlined scheme.
5. **Admit the sun; give your windows a chance.** Expose glass area by letting the draperies cover the wall, not the window.
6. **Take advantage of the inherent beauty** found in uncarved woods, the natural texture of fabrics and plain colors. This does not mean that you should never use figured fabrics or furniture that has been carved with restraint. It does mean that the simpler, natural elements should carry the bulk of your decorating.
7. **Use modern inventions and conveniences** as they are. Do not encumber them with traditional trimmings.

